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## **‘Parallel Games’ and Queer Memories: Performing LGBT Testimonies in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>**

Stefanie Lehner

In the recent performed queer archive (with video installations), *Trouble*, written by Shannon Yee and produced, designed, and directed by Niall Rea (the latter, with Anna Newell), Northern Irish actor Jimmy Kerr delivers a short monologue from a video screen, explaining to the audience the difficulty of living in Northern Ireland as a gay man:

Staying in Northern Ireland...there is a sort of trauma that stays with you, someone in a battering relationship or poisonous relationship with alcohol, you know you should break away from it but you keep returning to it. That’s a problem. There’s a cognitive dissonance there for gay people. You want to be part of a family, you want to be part of a church, you want to be part of society but if they know you as you really are, they won’t accept you. But you really want to be accepted. So you play a parallel game in your life.<sup>2</sup>

*Trouble*, as apparent in its promotion poster (*Figure 1*), uses for its ‘o’ the symbol of a ‘pink triangle, rewind button’ to indicate its intention of recovering ‘the experiences of a generation of individuals from the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender] community that realised their sexuality while growing up during the Troubles in Northern Ireland’.<sup>3</sup> Based on 46 interviews, it documents ‘individual’s private stories of cultural identity, sexuality and coming out, religion, feminism, sectarianism, racism, conversion therapy, paramilitaries, politics, the normalization of

violence and the effects of the Troubles on the psyche' against the larger historical, political backdrop of the Northern Irish conflict.<sup>4</sup> As such, it delineates a complex matrix of exclusions – but also a desire for inclusion – that define and regulate expressions of identity and sexuality in Northern Ireland, as suggested by the speaker above. His desire to belong to structures that oppress and discriminate against him force this man to 'play a parallel game': for him, this is a necessary strategy of survival in an extremely homophobic society. While the concept of playing a 'game' gestures here towards the rules, roles, and regulatory practices that define and confine expressions of identity (including gender and sexuality), it foregrounds at the same time their construction; the performative nature of all identities. The notion of parallelism suggests, on the one hand, the incompatibility of ethno-nationalism with LGBT issues in a deeply divided society such as Northern Ireland. The incommensurability between sectarian and queer politics is also addressed in Niall Rea's *Divided, Radical and Gorgeous (D.R.A.G.)*, which explores the personal experiences of a Belfast drag queen in the form of a testimonial monologue that recounts her relationship with a closeted 'freedom fighter'. Furthermore, queer identities are used by both productions as an 'analogous' lens to deconstruct and disrupt sectarian divisions of difference.<sup>5</sup> The notion of playing a 'parallel game' can, thus, be read as a meta-theatrical commentary that emphasises that while these plays, based on personal memories of the Troubles, are products of their socio-historical reality, they also provide an alternative, transformative realm, in which it is possible to rethink the conditions of the present through uncovering silenced and neglected voices and experiences of the past. Both plays do so by 'queering' memories of the Troubles that may otherwise be filtered through an ethno-nationalist lens. While in Northern Ireland, collective memory has congealed into two mutually exclusive

versions of history (namely, Protestant/unionist/loyalist and Catholic/nationalist/republican), ‘queer memory’, as David Cregan suggests, ‘is transformative in seeking to destabilise any particular version of the past. It offers a self-reflective and socially challenging voice in the midst of memory formation, queering marginalized memory as well as memory of the dominant.’<sup>6</sup>

This essay explores how the notion of ‘parallel games’ works to queer memory in two productions of Northern Ireland’s first publicly funded gay theatre company, TheatreofplucK, led by artistic director Niall Rea.<sup>7</sup> Both plays have seen different versions as part of their development: *Trouble* saw its first incarnation in an invitation-only workshop at the Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) in Belfast in the summer of 2013,<sup>8</sup> while there have been three iterations of *D.R.A.G.* to date: Rea initially worked with Gordon Crawford (who performs as the Belfast drag queen Trudy Scrumptious), who played in the first two versions in 2012, and was joined by Paul C. Boyd, who took over the role in 2012. This essay focuses on the world premiere of *Trouble* at the MAC in November 2015 as part of OUTBURST Queer Arts Festival, and the last, recorded version of *D.R.A.G.* at The Belfast Barge as part of the Belfast Pride Festival in July/August 2012. As post-conflict memory works, based on the testimonies of the interviewees, as in the case of *Trouble*, or autobiographical memories of both director and actors, as in the case of *D.R.A.G.*, and conceived, developed, and produced after the 1998 Belfast Agreement, both plays directly engage with contemporary debates about how to deal with the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland. In publicly performing and thus giving voice to previously silenced and hidden stories of LGBT people during the conflict, both productions address the call of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, that resulted from the series

of negotiations between Dr Richard Haass and Professor Meghan O'Sullivan in autumn 2013, for the establishment of 'an Oral History Archive to provide a central place for people from all backgrounds (and from throughout the UK and Ireland) to share experiences and narratives related to the Troubles.'<sup>9</sup> This endeavour promises plurality by including disparate and incommensurable stories; yet, there is also a danger within any archival project that certain experiences, voices, and stories find more representation and greater valorisation than others. Given the reluctance of certain groups, such as former police officers, to participate in such storytelling activities, and the high profile of other voices and stories, it seems difficult for such an archive to present proportionally who was affected by the Troubles in equal measure.<sup>10</sup>

In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida points to the etymology of the term 'archive', which 'names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*': that is, archives denote origins as much as they are products of authority, control, and power.<sup>11</sup> As Ed Madden puts it, 'they produce as much as they record and preserve'.<sup>12</sup> As the promised multiplicity of stories will commence new understandings of the past, present, as well as the future, and thereby contribute to the 'fresh start' envisioned by the 1998 Agreement, the archival impulse displayed in its wake is, as Colin Graham notes, at the same time, suggestive of a desire 'to cram all that glistens with the not-so-gold of the Troubles into a memory bank of material culture and traumatic non-recall.'<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the establishment of an oral history archive seems a necessary step for 'moving on' from the legacy of the past; for moving beyond the trauma and residual sectarian legacies of the Troubles. In other words, the past is viewed through an educative prism and is closely connected to a progressive and purposive morality

that was perhaps most succinctly captured in the decision to use Margaret Fairless Barber's words as an epigraph to the 2009 Report of the Consultative Group on the Past in Northern Ireland: 'To look backward for a while is to refresh the eye, to restore it, and to render it more fit for its prime function of looking forward'.<sup>14</sup> Given the effective institutionalisation of ethno-nationalist understandings of the conflict,<sup>15</sup> the political imperative, then, seems to be double-edged: in one respect, it must entail, if not a suppression, then, at least a muting of memories that stand outwith the ethnic paradigm; and, in another, it ought to facilitate the implicit valorising of narratives that support a progressivist vision of contemporary Northern Irish society.

Both *D.R.A.G.* and *Trouble* disturb such a progressivist understanding of 'moving on': instead of memories being harnessed to the ethno-nationalist template established by the Belfast Agreement, the plays 'move' memory work in different directions at the same time, giving rise to a diverse set of emotions. This movement, in other words, parallels the Agreement's filtration of experience and belief into ethnicised modalities. The plays thus resonate with Michael Rothberg's concept of 'multidirectional memory', which is based on a malleable, pluralist understanding of memory, considering it 'as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing: as productive and not privative'.<sup>16</sup> Whereas the focus of Rothberg's model is on the articulation and performance of traumatic memories across transnational and intercultural contexts, the testimonies performed in both TheatreofplucK productions are 'multidirectional' insofar as they rupture the dominant perception of Northern Ireland as a 'place apart' – 'a recalcitrantly regressive place somehow separate from the modern progressive world'<sup>17</sup>: for by focusing on the memories of LGBT people, they challenge (ethno and hetero)normative understandings of victimisation,

oppression, and isolations while, at the same time, recovering ‘new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice’.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the productions could also be said to initiate ‘parallel games’ with their audiences: the past is dis/uncovered not just in terms of regionality, sectarianism and violence, but also in its containment of alternative forms of communality and togetherness.

This creates not so much ‘moving memories’ in the sense of simply becoming emotionally involved through sympathy or empathy in identifying individually with the characters; instead, the use of memories in both productions produces quasi Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekte* that emphatically unsettle the spectators to make them adopt ‘an attitude of inquiry and criticism’ towards accepted and prescriptive readings of Troubles memories as well as contemporaneous approaches to dealing with the past along those lines.<sup>19</sup> In line with several post-conflict theatre performances by companies such as Kabosh, Tinderbox, Big Telly, and Prime Cut, both *D.R.A.G.* and *Trouble* do so by harnessing experimental theatre techniques, such as the use of verbatim, improvisation, multi-media, and audience involvement, if to different extents. For instance, whereas *Trouble* is predominantly inspired by verbatim theatre, in the style of American playwrights Anna Deavere and Eve Ensler, whereby actors seek to carefully replicate the natural cadences, enunciation, silences, and emotions of the original voice recordings,<sup>20</sup> *D.R.A.G.* used detailed autobiographical interviews with the performers to inspire games of improvisation. Both productions construct a bricolage of the different memories and testimonials, repeatedly challenging audience experience and expectation by creating parallel sensations of estrangement, exclusion, and isolation as well as connectedness, inclusion, and integration.

*D.R.A.G.* and *Trouble* self-consciously draw attention to their status as ‘games’ that ask for audience participation but also their awareness of what Al Head calls ‘the “Foolish” insight’ that ‘all the conventional ways of being are “only a game” and that the “masks” that we play can be picked up or put down at will.’<sup>21</sup> Head suggests this as a queer strategy ‘to help us in our analyses of the dominant society and the way it “creates” stereotypes of gender and sexuality’ and other forms of identity, and, we might add, history; as such, it plays a crucial role in TheatreofplucK’s queer dramaturgy. Rea opens both productions with a short spiel introducing the spectators to what he calls ‘the rules of game’.<sup>22</sup> For *D.R.A.G.*, he asks each of them to write a queer ‘devotion’ on a small piece of black paper before entering the actual performance space, which they then place on the stage, itself already covered with hundreds of other identical pieces of paper. The significance of these papers is twofold: on the one hand, handwritten notes with directorial comments, often based on the autobiographical interviews held before each rehearsal with the actors, were used for the improvisations that shaped and developed the direction of *D.R.A.G.*, and were also included in the final productions, which use the pieces of paper, apparently randomly picked up from the floor of the stage, to introduce different scenes, subjects and topics of the life of the main character ‘P’. On the other hand, by offering a personalised ‘devotion’, which was often a private memory, wish, or just a thought or a comment,<sup>23</sup> the audience engaged through these papers in what Rea conceived of as a ‘community ritual’, resonant of the rag trees that dot the Irish landscape.<sup>24</sup> As Rea explains, this ‘ritual’ was intended to offer each spectator ‘a kind of direct and personal queer connection to the onstage world; temporally disconnected from the “straight” outside world’, yet thereby suggesting their parallelism.<sup>25</sup> *D.R.A.G.* itself opens with the performer, initially covered by these papers, rising naked, vulnerable,



and bruised from this heap; as Rea notes: 'The performer here was born from the audiences['] own engagement, queerly energised'.<sup>26</sup> This, I want to suggest, is a truly queering and thus destabilising energy that creates intimacy at the same time as discomfort, drawing the audience in as much as keeping them at bay. Given that the performance uses the same black papers to mark its scenes, with each seemingly randomly selected paper shown to a camera so that its inscription is projected to the black backwall of the stage, there is an anxiety amongst the audience that their own personal 'devotions' will be revealed.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, their 'queer confessional' creates what Rea calls a 'public bond'<sup>28</sup> with the performer, which is compounded by what a reviewer describes as 'the cramped, claustrophobic surroundings of the Belfast Barge [where] the seating arrangements bring the audience challengingly close to Paul C. Boyd's tormented, stripped down presence.'<sup>29</sup>

Rea's thrust staging replicates the space dynamics of drag clubs, evoking both a dressing room as well as a nightclub stage. The white cubic set provides the audience with a sort of proscenium frame, which – together with the use of the camera, installed next to a vanity mirror, and projecting onto the backwall – raises awareness to the dynamics and power of the spectator's gaze. This visual play with intimacy and exposure parallels the use of the papers and the way in which 'P' immediately distances himself from his own 'confessions' by asserting that 'This is not a biography/ It has fuck all to do with me/ It's just a bunch of stories that relate to each other – don't try to read anything deep or meaningful into any of this ... I am not gonna be sharing any of my inner most secrets – or confessing any sins.'<sup>30</sup> Yet, he immediately appeals to (and thereby exposes) our desire as spectators to witness 'Some dark, dirty sins that you will be shocked by ... Some horrifying sins that make

you feel so much more superior to me', while he puts on a '*balaclava as a confessional – kneels*'.<sup>31</sup> The repeated emphasis on 'sins' together with the symbolism of the balaclava, a 'hyperbolic symbol of terror'<sup>32</sup> typically used by Northern Irish paramilitaries, speaks to the specific context of the Northern Irish Troubles in which the perceived 'sin' of homosexuality (by both unionism/loyalism, if to a larger extent, as well as nationalism/republicanism) could, when disclosed, easily lead to homophobic hate crimes and killings, as addressed in both *D.R.A.G.* and *Trouble*.<sup>33</sup> The implication of the audience as potential voyeurs and consumers not only of his personal 'sins' but also 'your sins ... our sins', furthermore, confronts them with their collusion in Northern Ireland's 'surveillance culture', which, as Kathryn Conrad argues, while helping in the post-conflict context to make issues, such as sectarian hate-crimes, visible and bring them into the civic realm, still 'impinges on privacy and bodily integrity as much as or more than the surveillance employed during the conflict'.<sup>34</sup> This becomes evident in the following scene where we watch the performer carefully putting on make-up, slowly transforming him into 'her', thereby 'highlighting the process of creating 'roles' of any type, whether theatrical or social'.<sup>35</sup> Here, again, the intimacy of the moment is abruptly ruptured when the performer '*threatens [the] audience*' with a gun, exclaiming 'Freaks' in reaction to the perceived intrusion of his personal space by the public gaze of the spectators. The confrontation and shock is somewhat deflated when he playfully '*winks at one cute man in front row*'. Both scenes work to 'queer' these paradigmatic symbols of hyper-masculine paramilitary sectarian identities through their subversive handling by a drag queen.<sup>36</sup> However, both times these symbols are also used to expose the collusion of the audience with processes of voyeurism, making us, evocative of Seamus Heaney's description in 'Punishment', complicit in 'cast[ing] the stones of silence'.<sup>37</sup> This

complicity is brought to the fore in the Brechtian interlude '*An Ode to Our Silence*' in which Boyd stands directly in front of the camera so that his 'accusatory face' is magnified onto the back wall, while recounting the crimes of what Rea describes as 'the serial killer of prejudice and bigotry within all humanity'.<sup>38</sup> The last stanza directly addresses the present audience, thereby implicating them, as by-standers, in allowing violence against any kind of 'other' to continue to happen: 'There is a serial killer loose in this town – he is killing people who go to strange experimental theatre shows in tiny venues.'<sup>39</sup>

Comparable to Frank McGuinness' queer dramaturgy in *Carthaginians*, which offered Rea an important inspiration, *D.R.A.G.* repeatedly engages its audience with painful memories of the Troubles as well as their contemporary resonances. Yet, its use of both 'camp aesthetic and a campy drag-queen' unsettles our reaction, creating laughter in the face of distress, as apparent in the audience reaction to the last stanza of the 'Ode' above. As Cregan argues, 'These contradictory characteristics of camp allow it to function as a performative praxis in the queer project of unsettling what has become the normative approach to either histories, ideologies, or subjectivities. [...] In its queerness, camp has the capacity to hold together what otherwise might be considered antithetical: the authentic and the theatrical.'<sup>40</sup> As such, it provides not just a sense of 'identity and togetherness, fun and wit', but, as Richard Dyer suggests, camp must be also seen as form of 'self-mockery' (or even 'self-hating').<sup>41</sup> This becomes apparent in the exaggerated parody of different types of gays that the performer depicts in a more and more frantic dance around the small stage set. This scene becomes something of a 'play-within-a-play', a 'parallel game' to the stage reality, self-consciously foregrounding these different 'types' as 'roles' in a way in

which we recognise what Sontag calls ‘the metaphor of life as theatre.’<sup>42</sup> At the end, the performer collapses on the heap of papers, expressing the ‘need write all this down –/ How we got here – got to be all these different people. Tell it the way it was – [...] all the false turns and dead ends / All the abuse....and the laughs too’.<sup>43</sup> Such an alternative historiography can be provided by a queer archive, to which Rea’s *D.R.A.G.* seeks to contribute. The pile of papers is intended to allude here to the many other untold stories that together show a potential to suggest ‘how things might start to be’.<sup>44</sup> In this, *D.R.A.G.* evokes Derrida’s claim that the archive must involve ‘a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.’<sup>45</sup> Yet, in the play itself, the process of memory-mapping an alternative queer future is forestalled by P’s reminiscences of the breakup of her relationship with her ‘beautiful closeted freedom fighter’. While this liaison between a drag queen and a hyper-masculine terrorist could be read ‘a sexualized metaphor for reaching across sectarian division of difference’,<sup>46</sup> his parting letter emphasises the apparent inhospitality of consociational Northern Irish politics with a queer agenda in his new role as peacemaker-politician:

Dear P  
 I’ve been doing a lot of reading in here.  
 I wanted to sort out in my head what happened and where we fitted. [...]  
 I think you are brave in your skirt  
 Looking for something different – some other way of being [...]  
 But we’re fighting with our words now  
 Taking it up to that place on the hill  
 You’re stronger than I am  
 You don’t need to follow the rules I do  
 Sure maybe sometime in the future....<sup>47</sup>

This incongruity is emphasised by the fact that in Rea’s play, it is this closeted gay lover who is imagined to be the killer of Darren Bradshaw, a police constable killed

by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) in May 1997. *D.R.A.G.* prepones the event so that the closeted killer can become part of the Agreement's early release of prisoners scheme, effectively turning him from paramilitary to peacemaker – in effect, echoing the failure of the anti-discrimination legislation contained in section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act to inaugurate substantive changes in the political culture.<sup>48</sup> At the time, the killing was justified by a member of the political wing, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, who was also gay in the following terms: 'I have no problem with the attack.... He put on a police uniform and became part of a state which oppresses nationalists. His sexuality was irrelevant'.<sup>49</sup> Yet, the murder happened in the leading gay club venue at the time, the Parliament (which is now Villa), which Bradshaw was known to frequent. At the time of the shooting, he had been suspended and his personal firearm had been taken away. The event caused a shock amongst the LGBT community in Northern Ireland, shattering the conception of gay bars as safe and neutral spaces.

Notably, Bradshaw's murder also marks the crucial turning point in Yee's *Trouble*, emphasising their intertextuality. Like *D.R.A.G.*, *Trouble* opens with Rea briefing the audience about its 'rules', which involve staying on the white lines on the floor and following the instructions of the 'Pluckers', a group of ushers who will direct the spectators to the different parts of the performance, the latter offering audience participation in a dance, which Rea suggests will be fun, thereby self-consciously setting us up for an unexpected ending. The set of the longer first part consists of a transparent cubic room, which is created out of scratched perspex – visually recalling an interrogation cell, as well as the iconic photograph of the 'Soldier Behind Shield, Northern Ireland' (1973) by Philip Jones Griffiths,<sup>50</sup> thereby immediately situating the

piece in a Troubles memorial context. On each of the four sides of this cube three video screens are installed: on the main screen, the edited verbatim testimonies of over 46 LGBT people are performed by a high-profile cast of Northern Irish performers, including, amongst many others, Paul Boyd, Marie Jones, and Carol Moore, and these are juxtaposed on the other screens with images of the past, specifically the Troubles but also 'gay life' from magazines such as *Gay Times* or *Spare Rib*, and repeatedly a stone wall, in grey or rainbow colour, as an iconic reminder of LGBT history.

The audience is divided out between these four sides and asked to stand very closely together on the white lines, resonating with the space dynamics of the seating arrangements for *D.R.A.G.* The feed opens on all monitors with a moving torch song version of 'Dance Yourself Dizzy' by Ross Anderson, pitted to evoke what Rea describes as a 'community spirit', which foreshadows what is yet to come.<sup>51</sup> The screens then jump into different feeds, so that each side is listening to a different set of memories while the acoustics, however, enable an overhearing of fragments of those other stories. In his review, Chris McCormack describes this as a 'rush of repressed histories, released at once, threatening an overload.'<sup>52</sup> The spatial acoustics and visual stimuli, with the flickering images on the monitors mantled on the translucent cube, in which the figure of an almost naked man (Andrew Stanford) sits still on chair with a table, telephone, and microphone, indeed have an overwhelming and almost disorientating effect on the spectator, whose focus and attention shifts from the different screens and their stories to those of the other sides and the inside of the cube, trying to individually make sense of these sensations.

The testimonies on all sides are organised in a rough chronological order, addressing topics, issues, and experiences of religion; education; therapy; isolation; sectarian violence; organisations, such as Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), Cara-Friend, and the Rainbow Project; queer clubs and discos; as well as HIV and AIDS. Together, these testimonies tentatively trace what Yee describes as a ‘journey’ from ‘violence, loneliness, fear, isolation and the unspoken’ to ‘a place of community, acceptance, friendship and confidence (for some, a salvation).’<sup>53</sup> I suggest ‘tentatively’ because these stories refuse to be channelled into a clear and progressive trajectory that would provide a safe and stable memory. This movement has a spatial parallel in the way in which Belfast emerges in these memories from its traditional conception as a place of sectarian divisions as a possible space for alternative forms of togetherness, specifically through the reopened dance clubs in the 1980s. As one man (performed by Gordon Mahn) recalls:

With it [the clubs] was a whole other culture, those on the periphery of society. You did get the punks, you got skinheads, you got the gays, you got the lesbians, the androgynous-y whatever, all thrown into this mismash one Saturday night at the Delta. It was really alternative. And alternative cultures just grew from that, it was really really exciting. That was part of the reason you went to the Plaza or the Delta was to meet people from the other side, from everywhere, from all over Belfast, which was quite exciting.<sup>54</sup>

An ‘*older, Belfast*’ female voice (Katie Tumelty) confirms:

I say the gay community was doing cross community then. They had the common the nominator [sic] was their sexuality. And as long as they were accepted for who they were didn’t matter about religion. Everybody was there and everybody was welcomed. Didn’t matter what tribe you came from. Even in the heart of the troubles, and I mean the heart of the trouble [sic] is, there wasn’t one tri-colour, not one union jack, nothing was brought into the gay community. That space.

That 'queer' space and its promise of alternative communality beyond sectarian politics is, however, brutally shattered by the killing of Bradshaw that is addressed in the live performance of the exposed man who has sat the whole time inside the cube, which ends the installation part. As he slowly and carefully dresses himself in the uniform of an RUC officer, he recounts his experiences of homophobia in the police force and his encounter with the 'very vulnerable' young officer, Bradshaw, stating: 'I just thought that if the [police] had looked after Darren better, the Parliament wouldn't have been the only place he felt he could go that he was safe. That changed my life. His death impacted on me deeply. Because I felt we, the organization all the way to the top, and I had failed him.'<sup>55</sup> The scene ends in blackout in which the audience is led over to another part in the room and asked to keep between two white lines on the floor that create a circle. As the ushers turn into dancers, the lights and soundtrack transform the scene into a disco, with the crowded surrounding audience transmuted into the present spectators, fellow clubbers, part of the club community. As suggested by Rea at the beginning, several members of the audience (some more cautiously than others) start to move to the rhythm and interact with the performance in this way. Suddenly, we notice actor Stanford on stage, his white shirt illuminated by a pink beam, and at first timidly, then more confidently, he joins in the dance – before he is killed by an invisible member of the crowd, the gun shot reverberating through the space. While a white spotlight freezes his paralyzed body, the disturbed audience is ushered out by the Pluckers, with several spectators being severely shocked and traumatized, some (almost) crying and comforting each other. The unexpected recreation of Bradshaw's murder creates parallel sensations of threat, isolation, and rupture - as well as connectedness and communality. Thus, *Trouble*



reproduces a ‘moving memory’, which, true to its multidirectional dynamics, does not endorse a progressivist vision to suggest how far we have ‘moved on’. Instead, the choice to conclude this testimonial work, which also evoked many redemptive memories, with this moment works to remind the audience of the current political dispensation in Northern Ireland – notably, the situation where, just prior to this premiere, the currently largest party in the Northern Irish Assembly, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), vetoed a proposal for legislating same-sex marriage. When the installation part of *Trouble* transferred to Belfast City Hall in December to celebrate the tenth anniversary since the UK’s first civil partnership ceremony there – namely of Shannon Yee and her partner<sup>56</sup> – it, arguably, managed to parallel this trauma with a more hopeful memory.

The endings of both productions inspire a form of social activism in raising awareness of the challenge LGBT memories bring to the present political situation. Where the conclusion of *Trouble* alerts us to the continuous inability of ethno-nationalist politics to redress LGBT justice, *D.R.A.G.* closes with Boyd’s powerful rendition of a ‘Punk Torch Song’, dressed in a bejeweled balaclava that he then rips off – an image that was used in slightly modified form as the promotion poster (see *Figure 2*):

We’re not invisible now  
We’re here to be counted  
You’ll not be pushed to the ground  
If you’re lost  
You’ll be found  
Do you hear me?  
I won’t forget who you are  
Just hold your head up  
I’ll be the freak that’s unique  
Be the Queer without fear  
Can’t you see me?<sup>57</sup>

As addressed here, both works trouble the invisibility, voicelessness, victimization, and oppression of the LGBT community in Northern Ireland. In performing previously silenced stories, the works under consideration unveil the parallel existence of hidden and marginalised memories within the ethnically structured polity and hetero-normative political culture of post-conflict Northern Ireland. Furthermore, in so doing, both problematise archival projects that, in an unintended way, may recycle the parallelism of exclusion and liminality. As such, the productions work to emphasise an archival and memorial responsibility to creating as well as commencing a different future. As Derrida reminds us: ‘as much as and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should call into question the coming of the future’.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Shannon Yee, Unpublished Script of *Trouble*, October 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Shannon Yee, ‘Gay & Troubled?’ synopsis’, Shannonyee Blog 22 July 2011, shannonyee.wordpress.com/category/tr/ (assessed 23 May 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> ‘parallel, n., adj., and adv.’ *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2016. Web: [www.oed.com.queens.ezp1.qub.ac.uk/search?searchType=dictionary&q=parallel&\\_searchBtn=Search](http://www.oed.com.queens.ezp1.qub.ac.uk/search?searchType=dictionary&q=parallel&_searchBtn=Search) (assessed 18 July 2016).

<sup>6</sup> David Cregan, ‘Remembering to Forget: Queer Memory and the New Ireland,’ in *Memory Ireland*, ed. by Oona Frawley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), pp. 184-94 (p.193).

<sup>7</sup> TheatreofplucK was originally known as ‘Pluck’ formed by Irish director/designer Niall Rea and American performers Karl Schappell, Robin Patchefsky and Jon Stark in 1998 in Philadelphia. As noted on the company’s website, ‘The name Pluck was chosen to honour the memory of Christopher Hawks who had lived with Rea and Schappell, but who died from AIDS shortly before the company was formed. Hawks would have undoubtedly been a core company member, and his catchphrase of "oh pluck!" when someone did or said something special or out of the ordinary or brave seemed to embody the ethos of our attitude to performance.’ After spending some time in Europe, Rea returned to Belfast in 2004, where the company changed its name to TheatreofplucK. In 2008, it was awarded a small grants award from the Arts

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Council of Northern Ireland in 2008, making it the first publicly funded queer theatre company in Ireland. Theatreofpluck aims to produce ‘quality theatre for everyone, but with a queer slant’, especially ‘issues of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender identities in Ireland.’ To date, it has produced seven original full productions, details of which are on the website (see [www.theatreofpluck.com/archive](http://www.theatreofpluck.com/archive) ).

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of this workshop version, see Fiona Coffey, ‘Blurring Boundaries and Collapsing Genres with Shannon Yee: Immersive Theatre, Pastiche, and Radical Openness in the North, in *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland*, eds. by Miriam Haughton and Maria Kurdi (Carysfort Press, Dublin, 2015), pp. 135-150.

<sup>9</sup> *The Stormont House Agreement* (December 2014), available at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/390672/Stormont\\_House\\_Agreement.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390672/Stormont_House_Agreement.pdf) (accessed on 3 April 2015).

<sup>10</sup> See Cillian McGrattan, ‘The Stormont House Agreement and the New Politics of Storytelling in Northern Ireland’, *Parliamentary Affairs* (2015): 1-19.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression’, translated by Eric Prenowitz, *diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 9–63 (p. 9).

<sup>12</sup> Ed Madden, ‘Queering Ireland, In the Archives’, *Irish University Review* 43.1 (2013): 184-221 (p. 185).

<sup>13</sup> *The Agreement: Agreement Reached in the Multi-party Negotiations (Belfast/Good Friday Agreement)*, ‘Declaration of Support’, Paragraph 2, available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf) (assessed 5 June 2016); Colin Graham, ‘Every Passer-by a Culprit?’, *Third Text* 19: 5 (2005): 567 -580, (p. 667-8).

<sup>14</sup> *Report of the Consultative Group on the Past* (23 January 2009), p. 4; available at [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/consultative\\_group/cgp\\_230109\\_report.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/consultative_group/cgp_230109_report.pdf) (accessed 1 May 2016).

<sup>15</sup> See Robin Wilson, *The Northern Ireland experience of conflict and agreement: A model for export?* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Eamonn Hughes, ‘Introduction: Northern Ireland – border country’, in *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland 1960-1990*, ed. Hughes (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), p. 1; see also George Boyle’s chapter in this collection, ‘Northern Ireland: a place apart?’, pp. 13-26.

<sup>18</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p.5.

<sup>19</sup> Berthold Brecht, ‘Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect [1940]’, in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen. 1964), pp. 136-147 (p. 136). Dominick La Capra’s concept of ‘emphatic unsettlement’ is also gestured to here, see LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), p.78.

<sup>20</sup> See Fiona Coffey, ‘Burring Boundaries’, p. 140ff.

<sup>21</sup> Al Head, ‘The queer fool,’ *Sexualities*, 15.1 (2012): 3-10 (p. 9).

<sup>22</sup> Niall Rea, Unpublished interview with author, 13 July 2016.

<sup>23</sup> See ‘Appendix IIIc: Secret Queer Devotions left by the Audience on the stage at the start of the show (all iterations)’, in Niall Rea, *Queer Identity in Performance in Northern Ireland: Dissemination through Live Performance, with Attention to its Post-Conflict Context*. PhD Thesis. Queen’s University, Belfast, 2016, pp. 343-350.

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- <sup>24</sup> Rag trees in Ireland are often Hawthorn trees, close to holy wells or other symbolic geographical landmarks, which are covered in scraps of fabric, ribbon or clothing, representative of wishes, dreams, hopes or problems that are believed will be fulfilled or overcome as the rag disintegrates.
- <sup>25</sup> Rea, *Queer Identity*, p. 200.
- <sup>26</sup> Rea, *Queer Identity*, p. 201.
- <sup>27</sup> In the post-show discussion at the Courtyard Theatre, Newtownabbey, on 6th August 2012, one audience member emphasised that he felt ‘terrified’ putting his piece of paper on stage but then became ‘curious as to how they would be used’ (Rea, ‘Appendix II: Transcripts of Post Show Discussions’, in *Queer Identity*, p. 314).
- <sup>28</sup> Rea, *Queer Identity*, p. 202.
- <sup>29</sup> Jane Coyle, Review of *Divided, Radical, And Gorgeous*, *Irish Theatre Magazine* (2012). Previously available at: [www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Reviews/Current/D-R-A-G---Divided--Radical-and-Gorgeous](http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Reviews/Current/D-R-A-G---Divided--Radical-and-Gorgeous) (website closed down in 2014). The review is reproduced in ‘Appendix V’ in Rea, *Queer Identity*, p. 422-24.
- <sup>30</sup> Rea, ‘Appendix I – Annotated Performance Script of *Divided, Radical, And Gorgeous* – Third Iteration’, in Niall Rea, *Queer Identity*, pp. 264-281 (p. 265). [In the following abbreviated with Script of *D.R.A.G.*].
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Joseph Pugliese, ‘Biotypologies of Terror,’ in *Cultural Studies Review*, 14.2 (2008), 49-66 (p. 61).
- <sup>33</sup> For a detailed exploration of homophobia in Northern Ireland, see Marian Duggan, *Queering Conflict: Examining Lesbian and Gay Experiences of Homophobia and Northern Ireland* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
- <sup>34</sup> Kathryn Conrad, “‘Nothing to Hide ... Nothing to Fear’: Discriminatory Surveillance and Queer Visibility in Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, in *Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, ed. by Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009), pp. 329-46, (p. 342).
- <sup>35</sup> David Cregan, *Frank McGuinness’s Dramaturgy of Difference and the Irish Theatre*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 141
- <sup>36</sup> See Caitriona O’Reilly, ‘Politics, Pride and Performance: TheatreofplucK’s Devised Queer Dramaturgies in Northern Ireland,’ in *Devised Performance in Irish Theatre: Histories and Contemporary Practice* ed. by Siobhan O’Gorman and Charlotte McIvor, (Dublin, Carysfort Press, 2015), pp. 243-259 (p. 254).
- <sup>37</sup> Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 38.
- <sup>38</sup> Rea, *Queer Identity*, 155.
- <sup>39</sup> Rea, Script of *D.R.A.G.*, p. 272.
- <sup>40</sup> Cregan, *Frank McGuinness’s Dramaturgy*, p. 127.
- <sup>41</sup> Richard Dyer, ‘It’s Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going’, in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p.110.
- <sup>42</sup> Susan Sontag, ‘Notes on “Camp”’, in *Camp*, p. 56.
- <sup>43</sup> Rea, Script of *D.R.A.G.*, p. 279.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Derrida, ‘Archive Fever’, p. 27.
- <sup>46</sup> Cregan, *Frank McGuinness’s Dramaturgy*, p. 140.
- <sup>47</sup> Rea, Script of *D.R.A.G.*, p. 279.
- <sup>48</sup> See also Stefanie Lehner, ‘Post-Conflict Masculinities: Filative Reconciliation in *Five Minutes of Heaven* and David Park’s *The Truth Commissioner*,’ in *Irish*

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*Masculinities: Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. by Caroline Magennis and Raymond Mullen, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), pp. 65-76.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, Chris Thornton and David McVea, *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Mainstream: Edinburgh, 2012), p. 1407.

<sup>50</sup> Exhibited in *Northern Ireland: 30 Years of Photography* by Belfast Exposed (in partnership with the MAC), 10 May - 7 July 2013. Photograph available on Maxim Surin, 'Northern Ireland: 30 Years of photography. Belfast Exposed', Blog: [www.maximsurin.info/blog/northern-ireland-30-years-of-photography-bx](http://www.maximsurin.info/blog/northern-ireland-30-years-of-photography-bx) (assessed 23 July 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Rea, Unpublished interview with author.

<sup>52</sup> Chris McCormack, Review of *Trouble*, *Exeunt*, 16 November 2016: <http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/trouble/> (assessed 20 November 2016).

<sup>53</sup> Yee, Unpublished Script of *Trouble*.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> BBC News, 'Gay weddings' first for Belfast', 19 December 2005, [www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/4540226.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/4540226.stm) (assessed 20 July 2016).

<sup>57</sup> Rea, Script of *D.R.A.G.*, p. 281.

<sup>58</sup> Derrida, 'Archive Fever', p. 26.